

Subject: FW: New submission from Research Form

From: The Electoral Commission <noreply@electoralcommission.eu>

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To: ELC Research <research@electoralcommission.ie>

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1. What is your view on the five proposed research strands? Are there amendments or additions you would suggest?

I welcome what the Electoral Commission is proposing.

Strand B on electoral law would be a good place to begin, and my advice would be to consider the international experience of how Electoral Commissions deal with relevant issues. I would especially recommend to consider the Australian case as it is the only other country using STV on an extensive basis. There are numerous state, territorial and Commonwealth Electoral Commissions who regularly look at the various strands proposed in Ireland. Examples of electoral laws that could be looked at based on the Australian experience include:

1. Robson rotation. Ending the listing of candidates in an alphabetical format that can penalise voters with literacy issues and also result in some elements of voting on an alphabetical basis.
2. Facilitating early voting, voting at any polling station, not just a single local school, etc. This would all help make voting easier and might increase turnout
3. Electronic counting of votes (as opposed to electronic voting). This could speed up the process and eliminate errors in close contests. It might also help with the counting of the distribution of surplus votes. As things stand at the moment, only fractions of surplus votes are transferred and this can have an impact. In Australia in some cases, all ballots are counted to remove any potential biases.
4. Redesign of ballot paper. There could at least be some experiments with this. In Australia, the ballot has been altered to place a greater emphasis on party. Many people are opposed to the influence independents have in Irish politics, with some claiming it is due to ballot design. In both Australia and Malta candidates are grouped within party on the ballot.
5. Higher district magnitude. For Irish election results to be more proportional this is imperative.

See my note below on strand C re-electoral security.

In relation to strand A: it can be quite difficult to get accurate election results. They are scattered across numerous spots online and few of them are available in excel or similar type spreadsheets that would facilitate analysis.

For example, if I wanted to know how Fianna Fáil has performed in Mayo electorally across

the decades, there is no official government website providing such data.
The Oireachtas site has details of the last general election only:
<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/elections/>

2. Which of the research questions under section 4 would you consider most important and why?

Strand B for the reasons above

3. Are there additional research projects that you consider important to promote and enhance Ireland's democracy and electoral events? If yes, please specify?

Research projects into the consequence of different electoral laws would be immensely valuable. Michael Laver did such a study in the 1990s but there has been nothing comparable since.

For example, Ireland uses an electoral system that is so rare its practice should be questioned.

There also needs to be research into electoral security, which taps into strand C. The current system has the potential to be easily opened to abuse as there is little to prevent people from voting on multiple occasions in different polling stations.

There should really be one electoral register which could make this impossible and it would also allow us to determine the accurate level of turnout. Currently, we don't really know how many people turn out to vote, which is one of the few measures of estimating public satisfaction with democracy.

The lax attitude over 'home to vote' campaigns during recent referendum debates is another indicator of how the system is open to abuse. Non-residents under current electoral law are not allowed to vote even if on the register unless they are temporarily away for a declared period. There was little assessment done, if any, of the bona fides of the 1000s who flew home during recent referendum campaigns to vote. We know that these people were of a greater liberal persuasion than the resident electorate so if a referendum was decided by a narrow result a la divorce in 1995 this could undermine the validity of the process if the 'home to vote' voters helped to swing the process.

4. Are there any other comments or observations that you wish to make regarding An Coimisiún's research programme?

Ireland uses an unusual electoral system that is one of the least used electoral systems. Why is this the case? Does it have consequences for Ireland?

If our electoral system is good then why when countries in Africa, Central and Eastern Europe make a transition to democracy is STV never adopted in any of these countries and is rarely considered?

Australia has also experimented with different aspects of STV a great deal, and we could use their experience to facilitate a greater understanding of the consequences of STV, i.e., there should be more comparative research on STV in Australia and Ireland

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